

Promising Practice: Job Placement Assistance

South Carolina Department of Social Services

Project HOPE

Job placement assistance is a service provided by the South Carolina Department of Social Services' Project HOPE, a Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) program funded by the Administration for Children and Families' Office of Family Assistance. Many students who are enrolled in the HPOG program need to make money to support their families and themselves while they are furthering their education and working toward higher-paying healthcare jobs, and job search assistance addresses this need.

Job developers on the South Carolina HPOG program staff visit the boot camps, the first step in the student's journey, during the first week. At that time individual student assessments are made, including review of the student's personal and financial situation to determine the best job fit. Job developers work with the students to develop résumés and complete generic work applications to demonstrate the students' work histories. They talk with the students to determine what kinds of jobs the students might be interested in that are compatible with their home locations, their transportation situations, and their childcare needs.

Job developers contact employers in the area to make them aware of the HPOG program and the services the program provides. Then they present résumés of the students to the employers. To prepare students for interviewing with employers, the program staff conducts mock interviews with students and talk with them about dressing for success and other skills necessary to successfully attain and retain jobs. The job developers forge good relationships with employers in healthcare and other industries in order to facilitate continued work opportunities for clients who are in the HPOG program. The employers are encouraged to call the program any time issues with HPOG students arise so that the staff can work with the students to resolve them.

It can be somewhat challenging to find employers that offer the flexible work hours needed for students' school attendance. It is necessary to have skilled job developers on the HPOG program staff, and they need to be good salespeople for the program and for the students. They also should be familiar with labor market information and understand the current job environment. The job developers can identify jobs that are compatible with part-time entry-level work so that the students can pursue an education and work at the same time.

In areas where there is more than one location for a business, such as stores that are part of a chain, it is most beneficial to establish the relationship with the corporate office for the chain. Employers are often enthusiastic to participate because of earned tax credits they can receive by hiring HPOG students, so that becomes a good selling point to make with employers.

To demonstrate the dedication and work ethic that the HPOG students bring, HPOG program staff informs the employers when students they have hired are working and attending school at

the same time. They also inform employers about what the program does to provide childcare and transportation support, assuring the employers that these issues will not negatively affect their new hires.

The South Carolina HPOG program has three job developers on staff. They maintain their own databases of employers specific to their assigned regions, but they also share their information across the staff. Some of the businesses Project HOPE works with for job placement purposes also support the program in other ways. For example, Subway provides food-only vouchers for students in the program but also is a potential employer of HPOG students.

Promising Practice: Boot Camps
South Carolina Department of Social Services
Health Occupations Preparation for Employment (Project HOPE)

A boot camp-style training can introduce program candidates to the type of commitment needed to complete coursework, as well as enhance their prerequisite skill sets. The primary objective of the boot camp approach is to provide a realistic environment where students must learn to adapt to demanding situations typically encountered during their training program and professional life. In the case of HPOG grantees, this approach can be used to introduce individuals to healthcare occupations and their training requirements. Boot camps can also provide concentrated emphases in prerequisite knowledge and skills needed to enter the training program. This introduction allows the participant to begin to develop strategies for time management and gain an understanding of the daily preparations and lifestyle adjustments necessary to complete the program. Boot camp training can also provide students with an opportunity to build relationships with peers and instructors, initiating a support network to accompany them throughout the progression of training courses.

The South Carolina Department of Social Services utilizes boot camps in its Project HOPE program to address work-related behaviors (e.g., attendance, working with supervisors) and soft skill improvement (e.g., customer service orientation, time management) among its HPOG participants. The boot camps were developed from the project director's experiences in workforce development over her 40-year career. The boot camps are located in four different locations statewide and are conducted in four-week intervals on a residential basis for participants. The residential nature of the boot camp is similar to the practice used by Job Corps. During the Boot Camp, participants are screened and assessed to determine academic, economic, social and emotional barriers to success. This intensive approach involves pairing participants with mentors and HPOG program staff to enable participants to focus and develop their individualized training/career plans, eliminate barriers to employment, and link participants to supportive services. A key positive of the boot camp is the shared experience that the cohort of participants jointly undertakes. They report that this shared experience helps increase retention rates and bolsters participant camaraderie in the long run.

Project HOPE uses a boot camp as a first-step for students to support the successful completion of the condensed training sessions. The boot camp sessions also include adult basic education where deficient math, reading, and writing skills are remedied, so participants are able to transfer more easily into a local community or technical college for healthcare training classes.

There are some important factors to consider when implementing a boot camp. First, a location that is easily accessible to public transportation is important for participants' ease in accessing the camp. South Carolina also stresses the importance of focusing on communicating a sense of upward mobility in selecting a location. For example, selecting a community college (rather than a TANF agency location, for example) as a location for the camp conveys the feeling of higher education and upward mobility. Participants will gain the experience of being on a college campus by participating in the program. On the college campus, additional resources

and facilities, such as lab facilities, are part of the participant experience rather than only a traditional classroom. The college setting conveys to HPOG participants that moving upward through a career trajectory is a focus of the program.

Second, programs may want to work on marketing and promotional materials that describe the boot camp process and purpose to potential participants and potential program partners. Materials that are developed for prospective participants should realistically depict the investment that potential HPOG students will need to make along the journey. Truthful and genuine representation will help participants anticipate some of the difficulties that may arise and understand that many students have encountered these obstacles and overcome them in order to succeed. It is important to strike a balance in developing promotional materials that are worded in a positive and encouraging manner, while accurately conveying some of the challenges students will likely face.

Third, programs will need to recruit mentors to pair with participants during the boot camp and beyond into their subsequent employment. South Carolina recruited healthcare professionals statewide to become mentors. Mentors should be individuals who have experienced some of the same academic and personal struggles that HPOG participants are likely to face, as well as being in the same career field as HPOG participants are training for. South Carolina spoke to their HPOG partners about their employees serving as mentors. Many hospitals have community service requirements for employees. Hospital employees can fulfill these service requirements by serving as boot camp mentors.

Finally, it is important to ensure that selected mentors understand that they have a vital role as part of the case management team for HPOG participants. Frequently, the mentors have more regular contact with HPOG participants than others on the HPOG team. As a result of this greater contact with HPOG participants, mentors may become aware of potential issues and problems earlier than other HPOG staff might. It is important for mentors to share their case management notes and observations with others on the HPOG staff team so that appropriate resources and supports can be made available to assist the HPOG students in their journey through boot camp and beyond.